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Pine hunt for water picks up

By Teresa McQuerrey

April 13, 2006

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The Pine Strawberry Water Improvement District and Brooke Utilities, Inc. may link up to help solve the water shortage problems frequently experienced by residents in the communities north of Payson.



John Breninger and Wes Suhr of the Pine Strawberry Water Improvement District butted heads at a special meeting of the district's water development committee April 10. Suhr questioned Breninger's authority, saying he was no longer on the committee since being appointed to the board.

The PSWID held a special meeting April 10 to discuss a proposal made by BUI in March.

Robert Hardcastle, president of BUI, offered PSWID "exclusive access to (a well site in Strawberry) for the purpose of drilling a deep water well that would be directly connected to the water system infrastructure." The offer was made in a letter, dated March 20, with the request for a response, rejecting or accepting it, by May 1.

Hardcastle said the arrangement, if accepted, would remain in effect until Dec. 31, 2006.

The PSWID committee charged with the responsibility of water development was authorized to review the project and negotiate a memorandum of understanding with BUI.

The MOU was developed by PSWID Chairman John Breninger and Hardcastle -- Breninger had taken over chairmanship of the water development committee when Paul Paul, PSWID board member resigned from the post.

Several people in attendance at the April 10 meeting expressed concerns about the authority Breninger was assuming. There were also questions about why other water districts in the Pine and Strawberry communities were not being approached to help bring reliable sources of water to the area.

Loren Peterson's Strawberry Hollow Water District has the only well in Gila County certified as a 100-year producer. Other developers have recently had success in locating a potentially strong well in the Pine area.

The April 10 meeting was to present the proposed agreement and discuss it.

Breninger planned to present the MOU to the full PSWID board April 20 at its regular meeting.

The well site is a seasonal supplement to BUI water supply and is located in the east part of Strawberry with access available to the Magnolia Pipeline which already brings Strawberry water into Pine.

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Discussing the well at a special meeting March 23, Hardcastle said the well is currently 195 feet deep.

PSWID Secretary Gary Sherlock said the conceptual plans for the well call for drilling down as far as 1,750 feet or until they hit the basement rock.

He said the group's hydrology consultants expect to find water in the red wall limestone formation. It is hoped the deeper well will produce at least 150 gallons per minute, but 200 gallons per minute would be preferred.

According to Breninger, the estimated cost to drill the deeper well at the BUI site was \$860,000, which would not be functioning until 2008, or, if everything goes smoothly and quickly, it could be operational in 2007.

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